Pinochet Offers Exile to Jailed Chileans

9-12-74

By Joseph Novitski
Special to The Washington Post

SANTIAGO, Sept. 11—Gen. Augusto Pinochet today celebrated the first anniversary of his assumption of power at the head of the Chilean military junta by announcing his intention to free most of Chile's political prisoners, if they are willing to leave the country for good.

The chief of the anti-Marxist military government challenged Cuba and the Soviet Union to free an equal number of prisoners. He made it sound as if he were proposing a prisoner exchange under the International Red Cross auspices.

The Chilean official directly responsible for political prisoners said after the Pinochet announcement, however that the Chilean prisoners would be freed and deported regardless of the Cuban or Soviet reaction. He estimated that about 1,200 Chileans now detained for political reasons might be eligible to leave under Gen. Pinochet's terms.

"We had to make the challenge to them, they have so many prisoners," Lt. Col. Enrique Montero said. He is the deputy interior minister and his office issues all formal retention and release orders. "But we will go ahead and release ours anyway."

Col. Montero would not specify when the prisoner release would begin, nor exactly who would be affected. But he indicated that the best-known prisoners, like former Foreign Minster Clodomiro Almeyda, would be considered first and that the departure yesterday of Orlando Letelier, a Socialist and former ambassador to the United States, had begun the process.

Pinochet said, "The government announces that it is ready to authorize that, with the sole exception of some especially serious cases, those who wish to may leave the country definitively.

"If they do not use this right, the persons affected will remain submitted to the legal norms of the state of siege or

See CHILE, A7, Col. 5

Chile's Chief Offers Exile To Detainees

CHILE, From A1

to the findings of the relevant procedures." he indicated that some persons already sentenced might leave.

Chile's political prisoners are survivors and supporters of the socialist government of President Salvador Allende. It collapsed in a military coup a year ago today.

The prisoners have recently been estimated by officials to number between 6,000 and 8,000. But the government has refused to specify exactly how many of those it considers to be detained for political reasons, the description Gen. Pinochet used.

He delivered a generally tough anniversary speech before military men, officials and supporters in the gold-carpeted conference hall built by Allende's government for the 1972 United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. They sat in silence through his political prisoners announcement, then leapt to their feet, shouting and applauding, when he issued his challenge to Moscow and Havana. The chiefs of diplomatic missions of Britain, Australia and New Zealand boycotted the ceremony.

While Pinochet spoke at midday, offices and stores closed for an official half-holiday. Confetti rained from office windows in downtown Santiago as people celebrated the coup in which Allende died last year.

Raul Cardinal Silva, the primate of Catholic Chile and the foremost public figure here to press for an end to unlimited political detentions, torture and other abuses of human rights, sat by the podium as a special guest while Gen. Pinochet made his announcement. The president said he was putting an end to the "state of internal war" that has been in effect for 12 months.

"These are very, very positive steps towards the pacification of the country we are all seeking," the cardinal said.

For all the conciliation that Gen. Pinochet's speech offered, it also reaffirmed the military government's determination to go on ruling with an iron hand.

The lifting of the state of internal war, Pinochet said, would not change the nationwide curfew, nor the state of siege that permits unlimited detention without charge, nor the courts martial for pre-coup political activities.

Pinochet, the army chief who commanded military forces against Allende's government a year ago, also said that all political party activity would continue to be suspended "for several more years."